



Creating Team Agreements



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What are team agreements?

Team agreements—also called team norms or working agreements—are **mutually created and clearly stated expectations** about how team members will interact, make decisions, handle conflict, and support one another. These are typically created collaboratively at the beginning of a project or team's formation and revisited regularly.

Teams working with clear agreements work together within a common sense of purpose and an understanding of how to support one another and the processes of how to work together.

Clear agreements help to mitigate unnecessary conflict and eliminate assumptions about expectations, which increases psychological safety, trust and the team's overall performance.

The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team® model

Below is a brief summary of the five behaviors.

② **Trust one another**

When team members are genuinely transparent and honest with one another, they are able to build vulnerability-based trust.

② **Engage in conflict around ideas**

When there is trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas.

② **Commit to decisions**

When team members are able to offer opinions and debate ideas, they will be more likely to commit to decisions.

② **Hold one another accountable**

When everyone is committed to a clear plan of action, they will be more willing to hold one another accountable.

② **Focus on achieving collective results**

The ultimate goal of building greater trust, conflict, commitment, and accountability is one thing: the achievement of results.



The Five Behaviors®, John Wiley & Sons | Helen Sanderson Associates is an authorized Wiley Partner



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Psychological safety is a belief and expectation that no one will be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes

AMY EDMONDSON

”



Team agreements and psychological safety

Research by Amy Edmondson, a leading scholar on psychological safety, shows that teams with high psychological safety perform better, innovate more, and learn from mistakes more effectively. In psychologically safe environments, people believe they will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up.

Team agreements contribute to psychologically safe teams in several ways:



1. They set clear expectations for respectful communication

Working in teams sometimes involves emotionally intense situations. Without clear communication norms, team interactions can become reactive or strained. Team agreements help define:

- How people will listen (e.g., without interrupting)

- How feedback is given (e.g., respectfully and constructively)
- How disagreements are handled (e.g., with curiosity, not defensiveness)

This reduces anxiety about being judged and increases confidence that one's voice will be heard respectfully.

2. They build shared ownership and trust

When staff co-create agreements, they feel a sense of ownership. Research from organizational behavior suggests that **shared decision-making increases commitment and trust**, especially in settings where hierarchical dynamics are common.

This shared ownership helps shift the culture from compliance (doing what you're told) to collaboration (building solutions together).

3. They normalize vulnerability and learning

Team agreements can include norms like:

- “It’s okay to not have all the answers.”
- “We will assume positive intent.”
- “We will reflect upon and learn from conflict.”

By embedding vulnerability and learning into the team’s DNA, these agreements help reduce fear of failure—key to psychological safety.

4. They make the invisible visible

Unspoken rules can create confusion or power imbalances. Team agreements make implicit expectations **explicit**, reducing misunderstandings and creating a shared sense of “how we do things around here.”

This clarity helps newer or less confident team members participate more fully, knowing what is expected and allowed.

5. They offer a tool for accountability without blame

When trust is low, accountability often feels like punishment. Team agreements provide a **neutral reference point**: “We agreed to this,” rather than “You did something wrong.”

This allows teams to address breaches in behavior in a constructive, non-shaming way—critical for sustaining a healthy work environment.

For human services teams, where collaboration, empathy, and resilience are essential, team agreements aren’t just a procedural tool—they’re a **culture-building practice** that supports staff well-being and better outcomes.

Tips for creating team agreements

- 🌀 Listen to what is important to each team member and what each person needs to feel seen, understood and well supported.
- 🌀 Keep team agreements short and to the point.
- 🌀 Ensure that each member believes in the agreement and is willing to commit to putting them into practice.
- 🌀 Revisit team agreements periodically to see if updates are needed.

How to create team agreements

Creating team agreements from one-page profiles

Using **One-Page Profiles** to create **team agreements** is a powerful way to align how a team works together with each person's individual needs, strengths, and preferences. This method is especially valuable in human services, where empathy, self-awareness, and mutual support are central to effective work.

How to do it: What's a one-page profile?

Developed by Helen Sanderson Associates, a One-Page Profile typically includes three sections:

- ① What people appreciate about me
- ② What's important to me

③ How best to support me

These profiles are created by each team member and offer insights into personal values, communication styles, and support needs.

Step-by-step: from one-page profiles to team agreements



Step 1

Create or update one-page profiles together



Step 4

Co-create the final list with the team



Step 2

Look for common themes across the team



Step 5

Assess clarity, usefulness, and commitment



Step 3

Translate themes into behavioral agreements



Step 6

Make agreements visible and review regularly

Step 1

Create or update one-page profiles together

Give every team member space to complete or update their profile.

Encourage honesty and self-reflection. This is not about performance, but about what helps people do their best work.

Step-by-step: from one-page profiles to team agreements *continued*



Tip: Use a guided workshop or peer interviews to deepen the process.

Step 2

Look for common themes across the team

Gather the completed profiles and **look for patterns**. **Ask:**

- What do we all (or most of us) need to feel supported?
- What values or behaviors appear again and again?
- What support strategies might benefit the whole team?

Examples of common themes:

“I like to be asked rather than told.”

“It helps me when people check in, not assume.”

“I need quiet time after intense meetings.”

Step 3

Translate themes into behavioral agreements

Turn shared insights into **clear, specific agreements**.

Example translation:

Theme from profiles: *“I value direct but kind communication.”*

Agreement: *“We give feedback directly and with care, assuming positive intent.”*

Theme: *“I need time to process before responding.”*

Agreement: *“We give space for reflection and avoid putting people on the spot.”*

Step 4

Co-create the final list with the team

Bring draft agreements to a team session.

Invite discussion, refinement, and consensus.

Use simple prompts:

“Does this reflect what we need?”

“Is this doable for us?”

“Would following this make our team feel safer and more effective?”

Apply the six quality questions and reword as needed to make each agreement clear and useful.

Aim for **5–7 agreements** to keep things focused and memorable.

Step 5

Assess clarity, usefulness, and commitment

Rate each agreement individually using the Usefulness and Commitment Scales.

Discuss any areas where there are gaps or large ranges in results.

Step 6

Make agreements visible and review regularly

Post them in meeting spaces, team documents, or digital dashboards.

Revisit them during check-ins, reflections, or when challenges arise.

Add a norm like: *“We revisit our agreements quarterly to keep them alive.”*

One-page profiles to team agreements

Common themes from one page profiles 	Draft team agreement that will address what's important to team members 	Does it meet the 6 quality checks? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observable 2. Specific 3. Clear & jargon-free 4. Measurable 5. Team focused 6. Framed positively 	Revised team agreement that meets the checks 

Creating team agreements from values

Step-by-step: From values to team agreements

1



Talk with your team about your top individual values. In what way(s) do your values align with the values of your colleagues?

2



For each shared value, think specifically about why this value is important to you and others on the team.

3



Identify ways your team is currently living within each value. Be specific. What does it look like? How does it manifest at work?

4



What would it look like when team members are living outside the value?

5



In what ways could this value show up with greater intention? What more is needed to ensure each person on the team feels seen, understood and well supported? What would you see, hear, experience?

6



Based on your discussion are there team agreements you would like to propose?

7



Discuss the proposed agreements as a team and use Checking Team Agreements for Clarity and Commitment to finalize the agreement statement.

8





















Revisit team agreements periodically to check if they need updating.



From values to team agreements

Team Value	Important to us because...	What it would look like when our team is living within this value?	What it would look like if we were living outside this value?	Is there a team agreement we want to propose?

Example of team agreements created from values

Team Values	Team Agreements
 Collaboration	 We assume everyone is doing their best.
 Compassion	 We give and ask for feedback regularly using Confirmation Practices with an accountability partner every two weeks.
 Curiosity	 We work with transparency and ask for clarity when needed.
 Generosity	 We are clear with one another about our commitments and communicate when we can't meet them.
 Responsibility	 We share responsibility for the team's success by working out loud and evolving programs and offerings.
 Thriving	 We show up with our whole selves by sharing our one-page profiles and using a feelings and needs check in at weekly meetings.
 Warmth	 We share and appreciate our differences, gifts, and talents.
	 We share and listen to ideas openly by using rounds to hear everyone's ideas before deciding next steps.
	 We fail forward and share what we learn during weekly team meetings.
	 We encourage and support one another's wellbeing and self-care and introduce reminders during team meetings.

Checking team agreements for clarity and commitment

Checking for clarity

Do you have between 5 and 10 agreements? Too many are hard to remember and implement.

Do they only focus on our team and how we work, not with how we work with other team or departments in the organization?

Are they written as 'We statements'?

Are they written in clear language (avoiding jargon or buzzwords)?

Are they specific about what is OK and what is not OK, what people need to do and not do?

Could you rate how well you are doing on each one of them on a scale of 1 - 5?

Are they written as behaviors, not purpose statements or values?

🌀 Instead of "We respect each other", write

"We don't talk about people behind their backs, we talk directly to the person if we have an issue or problem and listen to their perspective as well as sharing ours." or "In our meetings we make sure we hear everyone's view before decisions are made."

Are they described with enough detail so that we would know if they have happened or not?

🌀 Instead of "We communicate well."

"We use Slack to keep in touch, checking and responding to messages every day when we are at work" or "We use Compassionate Communication in the way that we communicate together, with empathy for the other person's feelings and needs, and clearly asking for what we need."

Checking for commitment in team agreements

Do your team agreements help you live the values and purpose of your team and organization?

Can you see a connection or link between them?

Are you committed to putting them into practice? You can use a commitment scale to check.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Ask each team member to rate their commitment to putting them into practice on a scale of 1 - 10 with 1 being not committed at all, and 10 being fully committed. If people score 8 or below, ask them what it would take to move to 9 or 10.

Confirmation practices for living within team agreements

Statement	Score (1- 5)	Why I gave myself that score	What I intend to do (by when)
I am confident our team agreements address the right things.			
I am committed to living within our team agreements.			
I am confident I am living within our team agreements.			
When I notice that I am not living within our team agreements I change my behavior.			
When I sense a need for a team agreement to be created or revisited, I raise it as a tension.			

“

Culture is not what you
say. It's what you tolerate.

CRAIG GROESCHEL

”



What if we don't speak up?

In our work, we care deeply about the people we serve—and we care about each other. We've made team agreements to guide how we want to show up: with respect, honesty, support, and shared responsibility.

But what happens when someone doesn't follow those agreements?

Let's think about it with some *what if* questions:

- 🌀 **What if** a coworker speaks harshly to someone during a team meeting—after we all agreed to communicate with kindness?
- 🌀 **What if** someone regularly shows up late to shift changes, leaving others scrambling—even though we agreed to be reliable for each other?
- 🌀 **What if** someone doesn't respond to important emails—and we all agreed to communicate openly and stay connected?

If no one says anything, these behaviors can slowly chip away at trust, morale, and teamwork. People may feel frustrated or hurt—but unsure how to speak up.

That's why we're going to **practice how to hold one another accountable** in a way that's respectful, caring, and constructive.

This isn't about calling people out—it's about **calling people in**. It's about saying, "Hey, we agreed on this together, and I care enough about our team to speak up."

In this exercise, we'll use real-life "what if" scenarios and practice conversations that help us:

- 🌀 Name the issue clearly (not with blame),
- 🌀 Remind each other of our agreements,
- 🌀 And work toward solutions together.

This is how we stay aligned, support one another, and build a culture of trust—so we can do our best work for the people who count on us.

INVITATION TO PRACTICE:

“What if” accountability conversations

1. Start with a quick review

Look at your team agreements together. Which ones do we sometimes struggle to keep?

2. Speak up kindly and clearly

Sometimes, we notice something that doesn't match our agreements. Speaking up can feel awkward, but if we don't, trust breaks down. This is a chance to practice saying something—kindly and clearly.

Learn a simple 4-step script

Give this basic structure to help guide the giving **feedback** conversation:

1. **What I noticed:** *“I noticed you were late to the meeting...”*
2. **Why it matters:** *“That made it hard for us to start on time.”*
3. **Our agreement:** *“We agreed to be on time out of respect for each other.”*
4. **A request** *“Can we talk about how to make that work going forward?”*

In the space below, write your sample script to speak up when you notice something that doesn't match an agreement.

“What If” accountability conversations *continued*

3. Practice in pairs

- Give each pair a “what if” scenario (consider the scenario you were given, or choose one of your own).
- One person plays the team member **giving feedback**.
- One person plays the team member **receiving feedback**.
- Switch roles and try another scenario.



Tip: Stay calm, kind, and focused on the agreement—not the person.

4. Reflection

How did it feel to give or receive feedback?

What made it easier or harder?

How can we support each other in doing this for real?

5. Wrap-up with a commitment

Finish this sentence: “One thing I’ll do to help uphold our team agreements is...”

INVITATION TO PRACTICE:

Decision-making through our agreements

1. Values in action

Reflect and share one example of a time the team **lived up to** the agreements, and one time when they **didn't**.

What did that feel like? What was the impact?

2. Revisit agreements

Briefly read through the team agreements together. Which of your agreements might offer guidance for decision-making?

3. Scenario challenge and decision-mapping

Present a **real or fictional decision scenario** relevant to your context.

Example: *“We’ve received funding to launch a new initiative. We can either expand a successful program or pilot something new. There’s a tight deadline.”*

In your small groups:

- Review the team agreements.
- Decide **what the agreements would guide them to do**.
- Identify **any tensions** between agreements (e.g., innovation vs. inclusion, speed vs. consensus).

Decision-making through our agreements *continued*

Scenario

What our agreements would guide us to do	Any conflicts between agreements and how we will resolve them while staying aligned with agreements	Our decision

4. Group reflection

Did the agreements make the decision easier or harder?

Were there any surprises?

What does this tell us about how we want to use these agreements in our real decision-making?

What's one commitment you'll make to bring these agreements into future decision-making?



Reflection

Things I want to remember...

Things I want to try...



Resources

Brown, Brené. *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts.* (2018)

Summary: Brown emphasizes the importance of clear communication, shared expectations, and trust. She introduces the idea that “clear is kind, unclear is unkind,” which underpins the need for explicit team agreements.

Usefulness: Provides a strong emotional and practical foundation for building courageous cultures where team agreements can thrive. Includes tools for boundary-setting and accountability.

Best For: Leaders and facilitators creating trust-based team environments.

Coyle, Daniel. *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups.* (2018)

Summary: Coyle identifies three key skills of successful teams: building safety, sharing vulnerability, and establishing purpose. Team norms and agreements are central to psychological safety and group performance.

Usefulness: Explains why team agreements matter for performance and trust. Offers real-world examples from high-performing teams (e.g., Pixar, Navy SEALs).

Best for: Teams looking for research-backed reasons to adopt shared norms.

Lencioni, Patrick. *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable.* (2002)

Summary: Lencioni outlines a pyramid of team dysfunctions, starting with the absence of trust. One solution is the creation of behavioral ground rules to prevent fear of conflict and lack of accountability.

Usefulness: Provides a clear case for team agreements as a remedy for dysfunction—particularly around accountability and commitment.

Best for: Teams struggling with cohesion, trust, or follow-through.

Edmondson, Amy C. *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth.* (2019)

Summary: Edmondson explores psychological safety as the key to team learning and effectiveness. Team norms and agreements are tools to make psychological safety real, not just theoretical.

Usefulness: Backed by academic research and case studies. Provides language and strategies to integrate team agreements into daily team life.

Best for: Leaders building inclusive, learning-focused teams.

Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). *Creating a Team Charter: Tools for High-Performing Teams.* (2021)

Summary: This toolkit provides guidance for creating team charters with a strong emphasis on shared values, operating norms, and accountability.

Usefulness: Strong alignment with values-based leadership. Offers worksheets and templates for co-creating agreements.

Best for: Organizations and leadership teams formalizing team expectations.

Link: <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/team-charter-template/>

Laloux, Frederic. *Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness.* (2014)

Summary: Laloux presents a vision for “Teal Organizations” where teams self-manage through purpose, wholeness, and self-set norms—like team agreements.

Usefulness: Explores the philosophical and cultural foundations of agreements in self-led teams. Great for transformative change contexts.

Best for: Visionary leaders and change agents in human services or progressive organizations.

